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AUTHOR Pope, Myron L.; Miller, Michael T.
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ABSTRACT

This study explored the current demographic profile of faculty governance leaders, focusing on communication style. A total of 223 faculty senate leaders (or equivalent faculty governance leaders) completed a mailed questionnaire requesting information on demographic variables and communication behaviors. The questionnaire included the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension instrument and the Writing Apprehension Test. The respondents represented 76 research or doctoral-granting universities, 64 comprehensive universities and liberal arts colleges, and 83 community colleges. While it was found that the majority of the respondents were male full professors teaching in the liberal arts, females held the majority of leadership positions in the governance units of both research and comprehensive universities and in the liberal arts colleges. It was also found that the participants had moderate levels of apprehension for both oral and written communication encounters. Community college faculty governance leaders had the highest oral communication apprehension, followed by comprehensive university and liberal arts faculty leaders. Comprehensive university and liberal arts college faculty leaders, however, had the lowest writing apprehension level. (Contains 12 references.) (MDM)

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A National Profile of Faculty Governance Leaders in Higher Education

Dr. Myron L. Pope
Director of Student Recruitment and Assistant Professor
College of Education
Higher Education Administration Program
Box 870302
The University of Alabama
Tuscaloosa, AL 35487
(205) 348-0549
mpope@bamaed.ua.edu

Dr. Michael T. Miller
Associate Professor and Chair
Higher Education Administration Program
Box 870302
The University of Alabama
Tuscaloosa, AL 35487
(205) 348-1170
FAX: (205) 348-2161
mmiller@bamaed.ua.edu

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Abstract

Faculty involvement in institutional governance activities is an important component of college management. This management function, however, relies primarily on the volunteering of faculty members to participate in college governance. Institutions provide support for this voluntary activity through different types of formal and informal compensation, often depicting shared governance as an expectation rather than privilege. Little exploration has been done into the profile of these governance leaders. The current study was a survey of 300 faculty governance leaders, with 223 leaders responding to the mail-out survey instrument. The current discussion provides a preliminary analysis of the demographic data collected from the survey, including a demographic profile and communication apprehension.

A National Profile of Faculty Governance Leaders in Higher Education

Higher education faculty have been required to take on a great deal of responsibility outside of their traditional teaching roles within the past several decades. Deriving this complexity often out of research-centered responsibilities, faculty are drawn in diverse and meaningful directions, all focused on the advancement of their specializations and the environments in which they pursue these specializations. This new breed of faculty have been required to perform in instructional, research, and service capacities, all competing for the faculty member's time (Birnbaum, 1991). Due to the ambiguity of job responsibilities, faculty have found it harder to perform successfully in all three areas. As a result, many have questioned their participation in these areas and discovered that all, except one, are usually beneficial in their professional advancement the service component (Williams, Gore, Broches, & Lostoski, 1987).

Since service to the institution consumes a great deal of unrewarded effort, faculty have generally opted to stay removed from the process. Administrators outside of the faculty member's department are instrumental in creating this attitude, often due to the lack of acceptance of faculty commentary in the overall decision-making process. This adds to the environment of trust and mistrust between faculty and administration (Miller & Seagren, 1993). Many have recognized this with much concern and have attempted to encourage faculty input to safeguard their share of ownership in higher education, and have promoted involvement as a form of improving the campus environment (Miller, Garavalia, & McCormack, 1997).

Faculty senates have been instrumental in providing the faculty a voice in institutional governance. These forums have been lacking and partially insignificant in

the governance process due in part to low levels of participation, and in part to the perception that important decisions and issues are handled by "the administration" (Miller, 1997A). Further, there is some concern about the identification and role of effective faculty senate leadership, as evidenced by Miller's (1997B) finding that one of the driving forces for accepting a senate presidency was simply that a person was asked to do the job. Little about faculty leadership is known, and what does exist tends to take the form of personal narratives and sharing of individual experiences. Baseline and descriptive data is largely absent in this scholarly arena.

The concept of shared authority has been equally difficult to gauge. As co-governance was largely promoted as an extension of academic freedom in the 1960's into the 1970's, but the harsh economic landscape of the late-1970's and 1980's for higher education developed an administrative response strategy of quick and financially conservative decision-making. Therefore, the purpose for conducting this study is to explore the current demographic profile of faculty governance leaders, with specific attention to their communication styles.

Background of the Study

Faculty involvement in governance is a fundamental concept no longer unique to higher education. The private sector of business and industry have embraced quality management precepts that dictate the involvement of specialists and highly educated workers in the creation and implementation of policy and general decision-making. Faculty involvement in governance activities has been identified in the earliest colleges and universities in the United States, and repeatedly, the activity has been described as

processural, dependent upon the process of involvement to create feelings of ownership and acceptance in decision-making (Floyd, 1985)

Faculty involvement typically takes the form of a governance unit, such as an intended representative democracy called a "senate," an open town-hall like forum, or similar body of faculty who gather to discuss, debate, and resolve questions of policy and make decisions. The extent to which these bodies can be held accountable to the decision-making process is somewhat questionable, as some legal interpretation argues that there is no legal basis for faculty involvement in governance, and that specifically administrators have no right to request faculty to make decisions or act beyond the bounds of teaching courses (Miles, 1997). Citing Minnesota v. Knight and Connick v. Myers, Miles argued that faculty do not have a legal right to criticize their employer on administrative decision-making, and that this subsequently encumbers the faculty member's ability to be involved in making strategic decisions for the college.

The ability of a faculty senate or similar governance unit to effectively function has been noted by both scholars and practitioners alike, yet the value of the organizations to serve as forums for debate has been noted (Baldridge, 1982, Birnbaum, 1991). Miller (1997A) described the functioning of one such faculty forum, and noted low participation rates and few substantive action items. The National Data Base on Faculty Involvement in Governance research initiative at The University of Alabama revealed few differences between the roles of faculty in co-governance between research-oriented and teaching-oriented faculty (Miller, McCormack, Maddox, & Seagren, 1996), noted that teachers believe they do a better job when they are involved in governance (Miller, Garavalia, &

McCormack, 1997), and that the process of sharing authority has a great deal to do with how decisions can be accepted (Miller & Kang, 1999)

The key to these governance units, however, is the lead, elected or appointed faculty member who has the ability to provide group direction. These faculty leaders provide the pace, tenor, and tone of the particular faculty senate or governance unit, and subsequently define the group as being active or reactive, progressive or isolationist, willing to take risks or willing to hold the course. These leaders also have the potential to demonstrate and profess the extent to which group decisions are accepted and to what extent the senate provides a meaningful recommendation or challenge to the decision-making process and outcome.

Research Procedures

As an exploratory study, the current effort made use of a stratified random sample of faculty senate leaders at three types of colleges and universities: research and doctoral institutions, comprehensive colleges and universities and liberal arts colleges, and community and junior colleges. As no major collective clearinghouse on faculty governance offers a listing of senate or unit leaders, institutions were selected based on their Carnegie Classification, and subsequent efforts were made to identify faculty senate leaders. As a cautionary note, not all institutions made use of a faculty senate, and in those instances a lead faculty member was identified from the representative group (chair of the faculty council, chair of the faculty forum, lead professor, etc.), or the survey was mailed to the dean of faculty or academic affairs with a request that the survey be forwarded to the leader of the faculty governance group.

A total of 300 institutions were identified for participation in the study, with 100 drawn from each cell. Each faculty leader was mailed a survey instrument in early fall 1998, and one follow-up mailing was utilized to increase the response rate. The survey instrument contained a section on background demographic information and communication behaviors as indicated by the McCroskey and Daly Personal Report of Communication Apprehension and the Writing Apprehension instrument. These instruments have been demonstrated to be reliable and valid, and as a note, they have been described as having a moderate correlation (Richmond & McCroskey, 1989)

Findings

A total of 223 surveys were ultimately returned for inclusion in the data analysis. These respondents represented 76 research or doctoral granting universities, 64 comprehensive universities and liberal arts colleges, and 83 community colleges. As shown in Table 1, the majority of respondents were male Full Professors who taught in the Liberal Arts. The finding is somewhat deceiving, as females held the majority of leadership positions in the governance units in both research and comprehensive universities and liberal arts colleges, while males held a three-to-one advantage in the community colleges. Faculty rank in the community college, however, was more evenly distributed with the exception of 43% of the respondents who indicated a rank of "other," probably a result of the use of instructor or general "faculty" titles in many community, junior, and technical colleges.

Associate Professors outnumbered Full Professors by a slim margin in research universities, but Full Professors held the faculty leadership positions at 67% of the

comprehensive universities and liberal arts colleges. Overall, few assistant professors held the leadership position (overall 12%), although 19% of the faculty leaders in the community college held the assistant professor title.

For academic disciplines, the majority of respondents represented the Liberal Arts overall and at each category of institution, with the exception of the research university, where an equal number of respondents came from the "other" category. A total of 39 respondents overall came from other disciplines, such as architecture (n=9), and communications (13%) and medicine (10%) were the next largest disciplines represented.

Included in the survey instrument were the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA), developed by McCroskey in the late-1960s, and the Writing Apprehension Test (WAT), developed by Daly and Miller. Both instruments are measures of communication reticence. The PRCA consists of 24-items, and has a hypothetical mid-point of 75. High communication apprehension, an indicator of lower self-perceptions and self-confidence, is indicated on the instrument with a score of 88 or higher. Low communication apprehension, as indicated by a score below 62, is an indicator of increased satisfaction with formal education, effective public speaking, opportunities for discussion, and so on. The Writing Apprehension Test (WAT), comprised of 20 items, is a measure of apprehension, anxiety, or fear of writing. WAT scores range from 20 to 100, with scores below 45 indicating low levels of apprehension, and over 75 indicating high levels of apprehension.

Faculty governance leaders participating in the study had an overall PRCA score of 68 and WAT score of 60, indicating that leaders had moderate levels of apprehension for both oral and written communication encounters. As shown in Table 2, community

college faculty governance leaders had the highest oral communication apprehension level at a mean score of 70, followed by comprehensive university and liberal arts faculty leaders with an average of 68. Comprehensive university and liberal arts college faculty leaders, however, had the lowest writing apprehension level with a mean score of 57, followed by research university faculty with a mean score of 60.

Discussion

Faculty members are confronted with a complex duality of purpose when it comes to institutional governance. They have to decide whether to compromise in some areas, that is, research and teaching, to participate in campus governance, or to completely avoid the process. The result in either of the cases seems to be detrimental to the their existence in higher education. For those who are able to commit participation and ultimately leadership in their institutions, it is essential that they be excellent communicators, both written and orally.

The governance leaders in the study overall displayed a moderate level of apprehension for oral communications. These leaders, like most elected officials, tend to exemplify good oral interpersonal skills when they are among colleagues and friends. However, the true nature and potential for success a faculty governance leader depends on is the ability of the person to interact with various constituencies, especially senior administrators. Considering the recent relationship between faculty and senior administrators, it is essential that both of these groups work to eliminate this barrier. The most obvious way to improve this oral communication seems to be the inclusion of members from both groups in faculty meetings and also senior level institutional

meetings. Inclusion opens the lines of communication, while also providing both groups the opportunity to participate in each others' planning and decision-making processes. A mediator may be needed initially to ensure the development of trust and equality of individual group ideas.

Faculty governance leaders also tended to have moderate levels of written communication apprehension that displayed that they were fairly comfortable with the writing process. This comfort does not reflect the quality of their writing skills. Writing skills are extremely critical for many of these leaders because it is sometimes their only form of communication with some of their colleagues. In addition, these leaders must be able to develop written communications with senior administrators and external constituencies without fear of being scrutinized because of their writing skills in order to effectively communicate the faculty governance agenda.

The duality of communication identified here emphasizes the need for effectiveness in both to provide success for faculty governance leaders. Future faculty leaders will have to embrace the notion that being able to write and speak are criteria for providing the leadership necessary to encourage their colleagues to participate in the governance process and also communicate with senior administrators and external constituencies. They must realize that any faculty governance leader who decides to neglect or is unwilling to improve their skills in these areas will not be successful in providing leadership to their faculty's involvement in their institutional governance process.

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Table 1

Demographic Profile of Faculty Governance Leaders

Characteristic	Research n	%	Comp & LA n	%	Com Col n	%	Overall N	%
Gender								
Male	**35**	46%	**22**	34%	**64**	77%	**121**	54%
Female	**41**	53	**42**	65	**19**	23	**102**	46
Rank								
Assistant	**7**	9%	**4**	6%	**16**	19%	**27**	12%
Associate	**32**	42	**15**	23	**15**	18	**62**	28
Professor	**30**	39	**43**	67	**16**	19	**89**	40
Other	7	9	**2**	3	**36**	43	**45**	20
Discipline								
Liberal Arts	**21**	28%	**26**	41%	**46**	55%	**93**	42%
Business	**0**	0	**7**	11	**4**	5	**11**	5
Agriculture	**0**	0	**0**	0	**9**	10	**9**	4
Education	**2**	2	**2**	3	**0**	0	**4**	2
Engineering	**6**	8	**4**	6	**2**	2	**12**	5
Law	**4**	5	**0**	0	**0**	0	**4**	2
Medicine	**8**	10	**14**	22	**0**	0	**22**	10
Social Work	**0**	0	**0**	0	**0**	0	**0**	0
Commtns	**14**	18	**9**	14	**6**	7	**29**	13
Other	**21**	28	**2**	3	**16**	19	**39**	17

Table 2

Communication Apprehension Scores for Faculty Governance Leaders

Institution Type	PRCA Mean Score	WAT Mean Score
Research	66	60
Comprehensive And Liberal Arts	68	57
Community	70	62
Overall	68	60